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**“THE BEST SOLUTION WOULD PROBABLY BE TO NEVER TRAVEL ANYWHERE” –
EXPLORING CONSUMERS’ PERCEPTIONS OF LOW-CARBON HOLIDAY TRAVEL**

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Subject Marketing	Type of the degree Master’s Thesis	Time of publication May 2021	Number of pages 68+2
<p>Abstract</p> <p>More ecological, low-carbon holiday transport modes can offer a more sustainable option to conventional tourism travel such as airplane travel. This thesis aims to map out the overall perceptions as well as the enablers and barriers that consumers attach to low-carbon modes of holiday travel in the age of growing climate concern and “flight shame”. It does this by way of qualitative focus group interviews, where 15 Finnish individuals between the ages 23 and 38 are interviewed. The research draws from sustainable consumer behavior literature and sustainable holiday travel research as well as research concerned with the “intention-behavior gap” that is recognized in consumer behavior research related to pro-environmental consumption. Based on the previous literature and the findings of the qualitative interviews, an abductive approach is utilized in combining them to formulate a low-carbon travel perception framework.</p> <p>Based on the research, while low-carbon travel and its environmental impact are regarded positively, it is not seen as a form of holiday travel that would fit all needs and contexts. Low-carbon travel is regarded as having future potential but is deemed unfitting for certain situations and groups, such as inexperienced travelers. The experience-related aspects of such travel are appreciated but the perceived unattainability and other reportedly inferior qualities in comparison to airplane travel are not appreciated. The findings offer new insights for academic research in that they illustrate how consumers view low-carbon modes of holiday travel and by proposing a framework that illustrates factors that affect these perceptions. For managers and practitioners, the findings offer information about how consumers view different modes of transport and their potential in holiday travel now and in the future.</p> <p>The generalizability of the findings of this research is limited due to the somewhat homogenous nature of the interviewed population, all of whom are Finnish and represent a narrow age range. In future studies interviewees from different backgrounds could offer new insights. In the future, research that would focus on differences between avid holiday plane travelers and engaged low-carbon travelers could illustrate how different groups view such alternative forms of holiday transport.</p>			
Keywords sustainable travel, consumer perceptions, sustainable transport, consumer behavior			
Additional information			

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1 INTRODUCTION

The thesis aims to map out the perceptions that consumers have towards low-carbon modes of holiday travel that offer a more sustainable option to conventional tourism travel. First, this introduction part will guide the reader to the topic and related current discussions while justifying the significance of the topic. Then, the research questions that this research aims to examine will be presented and central terminology will be defined. Lastly, the structure of this thesis will be presented.

1.1 Background

Discourses of sustainable development, climate change and Corporate Social Responsibility, partially pertaining to the responsible use of natural resources, have been prevalent for the past decades and both companies and consumers have come to grasp the realities of the limited carrying capacity of our planet. However, regardless of these discussions, our planet is currently going through a mass extinction (Ceballos et al., 2017) and the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change has suggested that drastic changes ought to be made to keep the global temperature rise at 1,5°C in comparison to pre-industrialization times to avoid the most dramatic effects of climate change. The temperature rise of two or more degrees is recognized to cause far more damage and more severe consequences and should therefore be avoided (IPCC, 2018).

Companies and consumers alike have noticed the importance of these global issues, and many businesses have made efforts to try to tackle or at least address them by for instance launching greener product lines. Consumers are also paying more attention in trying to engage in sustainable consumption. Yet, it is to be noted that much of the research reports a gap between the intentions and the behavior of consumers, and the demand for green products has recently not been growing like in the earlier years of green marketing. (Solomon, 2015, pp. 170–171.)

Recently, the discussions pertaining to individuals' carbon footprints and air travel's significant impact on the carbon footprint has emerged in the public discussion. This can be seen in the term 'flight shame' having been coined (Cerullo, 2019) and in Swedish climate activist Greta Thunberg traveling to New York by boat in order to

minimize personal emissions, to attend UN's Climate Action Summit and to hold her famous speech (Law, 2019). In Finland, opting to travel without flying is gaining attention and interest among travelers which shows for instance in Matkamessut fair including low-carbon and flight-free travel stories and tips in their fair program for the third consecutive year in 2021 (Maata pitkin -matkamessut, n.d.). Furthermore, the Facebook group "Maata pitkin matkustavat", where members share advice and experiences about traveling by land has been established in 2015 and currently has around 22 800 members (Maata pitkin matkustavat, n.d.). This could be argued to also suggest an increase in consumer interest towards options for flying. Drawing from this fairly new phenomenon, this research adopts qualitative methods in an attempt to explore consumer perceptions related to low-carbon holiday travel.

1.2 Justification for the topic and the research gap

Research on sustainability and consumer behavior has taken place for decades: already in the 70's, Webster (1975) discussed the characteristics of the socially conscious consumer "who takes into account the public consequences of his or her private consumption or who attempts to use his or her purchasing power to bring about social change" (p. 188). Later, responsible consumer groups such as the LOHAS group (lifestyles of health and sustainability) have been identified (Solomon, 2015, p. 173) and consumer sustainability behavior has been researched widely both in the discipline of psychology (Schultz, 2014) as well as in the marketing and consumer behavior disciplines (Carrington et al., 2010). However, studies examining sustainable consumption mindsets and actual consumer behavior have found, that consumers do not often act as sustainably as they report about their intentions to do so (Moisander, 2007; Hassan et al., 2016). This seems to be the case also in the realm of discretionary holiday travel (Büchs, 2017). The phenomenon is often termed the intention-behavior gap (see e.g., Hassan et al., 2016; Johnstone & Tan, 2015). Scholars call for interdisciplinary perspectives on why consumers behave in a pro-environmental manner or do not and therefore it is important for also marketers to address these issues (Clark et al., 2003).

It is argued that exploring consumer perceptions towards certain, more sustainable products or consumption behaviors can explain the existence of the intention-behavior

gap, because perceptual interpretations and presuppositions affect consumers attitudes and behaviors (Johnstone & Tan, 2015). Since the existence of an intention-behavior gap has also been detected among holiday travel behavior (e.g., Becken, 2007; Higham & Cohen, 2011), by examining consumer perceptions, especially the barriers and disablers consumers connect with it, new ways could be found to promote more sustainable forms of tourism. Exploring why consumers do not act more sustainably despite their intentions can have great meaning to business management too, since for instance green product or service launch decisions based on consumer intention to buy can end up failing, causing additional costs (Carrington et al, 2010). Furthermore, explorations of consumer interest towards options for flying can give insight for business practitioners about the possible future directions and trends among tourism travel.

Currently, there seems to be a gap in the research that would examine consumer perceptions towards low-carbon modes of travel instead of flying. What is more, research seems to also be scant related to the barriers and the enablers that consumers attach with these modes of travel. Especially the factors that would enable low-carbon holiday travel in the eyes of the consumers seem to have been researched little. Johnstone and Tan (2015) suggest, in their research, that research of consumer perceptions towards more sustainable high-involvement purchases ought to take place. As holiday travel is something that does not take place as often and can be costly, it can be viewed as a high-involvement decision. Oftentimes the research regarding tourism and climate is concerned with reducing aviation rather than offering options for it. For instance, Büchs (2017) discusses the role of values in voluntary air travel reductions and Lin (2017) explores Taiwanese industrial tourists' behavioral intention towards slow travel in a quantitative manner. Moreover, Becken (2007) explores tourist perceptions of climate impacts of international air travel and possible mitigation policies.

However, qualitative research taking a more explorative approach to consumer perceptions towards low-carbon modes of holiday travel seems to be lacking. By adopting qualitative methods, a deeper understanding of a phenomenon in a certain cultural context can be formed (Myers, 2013, p. 4), therefore helping in building a more holistic understanding of the topic at hand. The research builds on literature

regarding sustainable consumer behavior and sustainable tourism, aiming to find explanations for unsustainable consumer behavior in research regarding the intention-behavior gap. Based on the literature review, a low-carbon holiday travel perception framework is formulated. The empirical part of this research aims to enrich the understanding of the topic by introducing the findings of qualitative data collected by way of focus group interviews, based on which the framework is revisited.

By doing this, the research aims to contribute to research regarding low-carbon holiday travel and build a framework of consumers' low-carbon holiday travel perceptions. Furthermore, the research can help managers and business practitioners in understanding better what travelers appreciate in their holiday transport experience, what qualities they assign to different modes of transport and how they perceived the future of holiday travel. All in all, the research aims to fill the extant gap by way of qualitative methods and deepen the comprehension of how consumers view low-carbon options for flying as modes of holiday travel. What is more, it aims to examine what barriers and enablers consumers perceive related to low-carbon holiday travel in today's age of 'flight shame' and increasing environmental concern.

1.3 Objective of the study

The objective of the study is to map out how Finnish holiday travelers perceive low-carbon holiday travel transport options and what barriers and enablers they perceive related to them. Therefore, the research questions that this master's thesis aims to answer are as follows.

The main research question is:

RQ1: What perceptions consumers have related to low-carbon holiday travel?

And the sub-questions of this research are:

RQ2: What barriers do consumers experience related to low-carbon holiday travel?

RQ3: What enablers do consumers experience related to low-carbon holiday travel?

The answers to these questions will be explored and examined by way of qualitative focus group interviews, where discussions with consumers will shed light on what they think about low-carbon holiday travel and whether they see it as a possible option. More specifically, the research attempts to gain understanding of matters that consumers think aid or prevent low-carbon holiday travel behaviors.

1.4 Terminology

In this part of the thesis, relevant and recurring terminology related to the subject matter will be explained in order to clarify what exactly is being discussed in the thesis.

Low-carbon travel as used in the context of this thesis, refers to walking, cycling, buses, coaches, and trains, while flying and private cars are not regarded as low-carbon. This definition is adapted from Dickinson et al. (2011) whose research ties low-carbon travel with the slow travel movement. In this thesis, the pace of the travel is not emphasized as much as the carbon emissions the modes of transport generate.

Sustainably inclined tourism in the context of this thesis, will refer to forms of tourism that aim to be more sustainable in their nature than conventional tourism. These include slow travel and eco-tourism, that are discussed in later parts of this thesis, but are not limited to those.

Critical consumerism, political consumerism, and ethical consumerism are all terms that refer to conscious acts of consumption by consumers that aim for certain type of betterment as opposed to consuming conventional products (Gjerris et al., 2016). The term ‘green consumerism’ is often present in similar contexts as well, but the word *green* tends to have connotations to specifically the ecological aspects of consumption (Merriam-Webster, n.d.), narrowing the scope of green consumerism slightly. A broader term, taking into account for instance human right aspects of consumption as well as the environmental aspects, is preferred in this context. Since Gjerris et al., postulate that the terms critical, political, and ethical consumerism are used somewhat interchangeably, in this master’s thesis, when referring to conscious forms of consumption to achieve change, the term critical consumerism will be used. However, it is to be noted that as many studies regarding sustainable consumer behavior are

directly concerned with ecological issues, when citing and referring to them, terminology used in the literature will be used to maintain the message of these studies.

1.5 Structure of the thesis

This thesis will be structured as follows: in the following parts, the theory related to the themes of sustainability and consumer behavior, as well as the intention-behavior gap and tourism and its sustainability will be examined in the form of a literature review. Based on this inquiry, a theoretical framework will be formed to aid in the analysis of the collected material.

After the theoretical foundations for the research at hand have been presented, the methods and study design used to gather the material will be discussed. This is followed by the analysis of the results of the study. The theoretical framework will be revised based on the empirical part of this research. Finally, a discussion on the results will be presented and lastly, conclusions will be drawn, accompanied by the research limitations and possible further research avenues.

2 SUSTAINABILITY AND CONSUMER BEHAVIOR

This section of the thesis will discuss sustainability and consumer behavior, as well as their relation to one another and other related phenomena. The foundations of the terms as well as theories offered to explain why consumers do or do not act sustainably will be examined. Furthermore, the phenomenon of the intention-behavior gap, the reasons for it and “closing the gap” will be presented as it is a prevalent and recurring issue in sustainable consumer behavior research.

2.1 Sustainable development

Sustainable development, a term coined in the United Nation’s so called Bruntland report in 1983 (Bruntland, 1987), has, especially in the 21st century, become an important principle in making sure to develop in ways that support the well-being of climate and people as well as the economy. As issues of climate change have become more prominent, so have discussions of sustainable development.

Sustainable development encompasses three dimensions, namely the economic, ecological, and social dimensions, pertaining to the welfare of the economy, the natural world, and humans, respectively. Critical consumerist thinking, as described in the following chapter, aims to take into account all of these aspects when making purchase decisions.

2.2 Critical consumerism and the citizen-consumer hybrid

In the recent decades, critical consumerism has gained popularity as it aims to answer the need of driving change in the market-driven modern world (Stolle & Micheletti, 2013, pp. 13–15). Critical consumer discourse is based on the idea that commodity choice is believed to both fulfil private consumer needs related to achieving health and happiness as well as simultaneously benefitting the society, whether it be in terms of sustainability or social issues (Johnston, 2008). These discussions are based on the notion that consumers have shifted from only having “enlightened self-interest” to also being interested in the common good, having “expanded self-interest”, a role that has

traditionally been given to the citizen rather than to the consumer (Gjerris et al., 2016, p. 82).

According to Johnston (2008), the emergence of the critical consumerist movement and the abovementioned shift in the roles of citizen and consumer has induced discussions on the existence of a citizen-consumer hybrid. This thought is rooted in the idea of consumers voting with their purchases and the seamless combination of the citizen and the consumer. However, it is questioned by Johnston whether any substantial change will be achieved by including the moral ponderings of critical consumerism into everyday shopping and the researcher highlights these doubts by the following conclusion: “From a critical perspective, ethical consumer strategies seem more like niche marketing opportunities allowing corporations to target privileged, conscientious consumers, than a substantive program for health, sustainability, and social justice at a global scale” (p. 240). (Johnston, 2008.)

In the context of this research, and in consumer behavior research in general, the consumers that are being studied might view themselves subject to the expectations of a citizen-consumer, having care for others aside from only themselves. Companies have, in turn, taken note of these recent changes in consumers’ ideals, and some have even entered political discussions and adopted ‘an activist brand’ (Koch, 2020). Whether the consumers have adopted the idea of ‘voting with one’s dollar’ it might affect their decision-making process and the thought processes behind it and affect the level of responsibility that individuals perceive they have, regardless of the true effects of their actions.

2.3 Ecological footprint and carbon footprint

Relevant for this research is also the term ecological footprint as well as carbon footprint. The term ecological footprint, developed by Rees, refers to the area of land and water needed to sustain a certain population, whether it be a city or an entire country (Rees, 1992).

Nowadays a more widely used term is the carbon footprint, popularized by the oil company British Petroleum in various marketing campaigns during the early 2000’s,

including a 2004 campaign that presented the public for the first time ever with a carbon footprint calculator (Yoder, 2020). Carbon footprint refers to the total amount of greenhouse gasses emitted during the entire lifecycle of a product, good or service (Galli et al., 2012). Extending this, a person's personal consumption of products, goods and services can be estimated to illustrate their personal carbon footprint (Lin, 2016).

2.4 Sustainable consumer behavior

Consumers and companies alike highlight ethical issues and sustainability in their thinking in the modern Western society. Scholars have studied these types of behaviors and tried to find theories to explain the consumer motivations and other factors behind pro-environmental and sustainable behavior. Environmental psychology is a discipline that developed in the US during the 1960s and which has explored the human behavior in relation to the environment, one focus of the research being why people act in a pro-environmental manner (Kollmuss & Agyeman, 2002). Companies have been found to include CSR in their marketing communication because it is an attractive selling point (Valor, 2008) and marketing strategies highlight the ecological aspects of products and companies to appeal to sustainable consumer groups (Carrington et al., 2010). Understanding sustainable consumer behavior therefore has important implications for marketers and business practitioners too.

2.4.1 Explanations for pro-environmental behavior

One of the earliest models to explain pro-environmental behavior is a linear progression model that assumes that if people are taught about environmental issues and their solutions, their attitude will change and therefore will their behavior. However, this model does not work in explaining human behavior because studies have found that the intention-behavior gap exists regardless of people's environmental knowledge. Furthermore, research has found many possible explanations for the discrepancy between attitude and behavior, such as the normative influence of surrounding people and the temporary nature of attitude and its tendency to change over time. (Kollmuss & Agyeman, 2002.)

Ajzen and Fishbein's (1980, as cited in Kollmuss & Agyeman, 2002, pp. 242-243) theory of reasoned action (see Figure 1) also theorizes that human behavior is rational and shaped by attitudes which in turn shape human intentions. These intentions are also shaped by social pressures and abovementioned normative influences, for instance. Ajzen has later refined the theory, adding the notion of perceived control in the theory, which considers the behaviors beyond a person's volitional control, forming the theory of planned behavior (Hassan et al., 2016). The theories of reasoned action allow for mathematical means of testing the relations between the variables, which has been adapted in empirical research (Kollmuss & Agyeman, 2002).

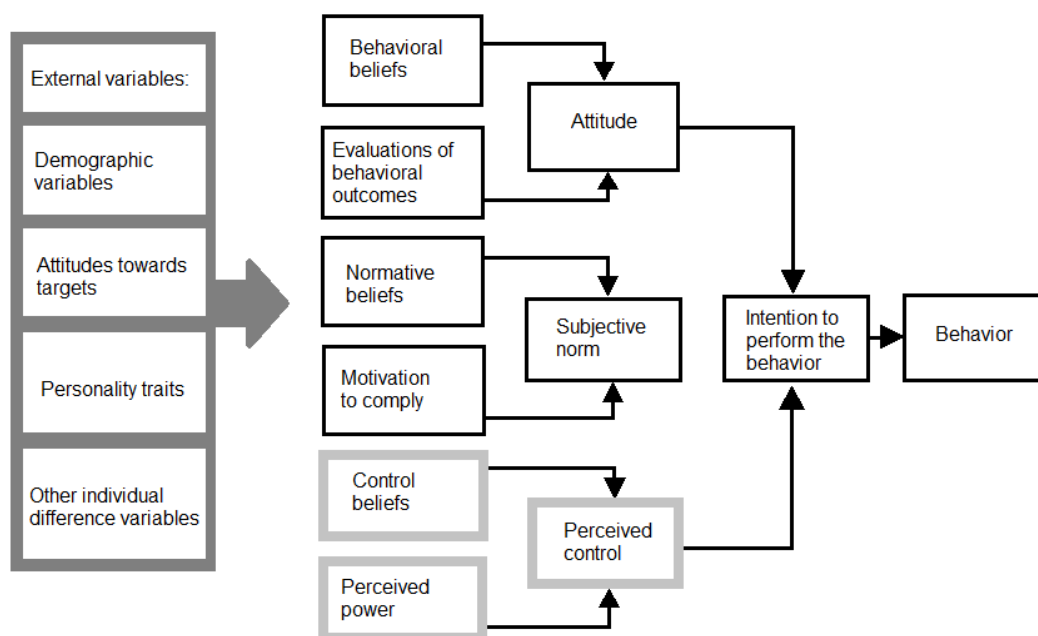


Figure 1. Theory of reasoned action and theory of planned behavior (in light grey). Adapted from Measurement and Application, n.d.

Prosocial behavior models, such as altruism, have been offered as explanations for pro-environmental behavior (Kollmuss & Agyeman, 2002). Altruism refers to deliberate and helpful behavior that is done to relieve distress in others without any personal gains (Baumeister & Vohs, 2007, p. 29) and altruistic tendencies are said to contribute to pro-environmental behavior (Kollmuss & Agyeman, 2002).

However, explanations revolving around self-interest have also been offered as explanations for pro-environmental behavior. Scholars have suggested that individuals

can engage in competitive altruism where altruistic, pro-environmental behavior is used to signal a person's altruistic and prosocial tendencies to others in an attempt to gain status in one's social circles (Griskevicius et al. 2010). Additionally, the theory of altruistic behavior giving people psychological benefits, the "warm glow of giving" as termed by Andreoni (1990) could also explain people's willingness to engage in pro-environmental behavior. Andreoni calls this impure altruism because it is not void of any personal gains. People can also engage in climate-friendly behavior due to personal motives, such as saving money and promoting good health, unaware of the climate benefits, for example when choosing to ride a bike to work instead of driving (Gifford, 2011).

Stern et al. (1993, as cited in Clark et al. 2003, p. 238) argues that a person's behavior is affected by the social, egoistic and biospheric value orientations, respectively concerned with others, with oneself and with the surrounding non-human world. According to this theory, everyone is affected by these orientations in different proportions, but the egoistic orientation, that is, the interest in the self is most prominent in people (Stern et al., 1993, as cited in Kollmuss & Agyeman, 2002, p. 245). When it comes to taking political action, all three value orientations predict willingness to do so. But it seems that only the awareness of personal consequences predicts willingness to pay taxes to protect the environment, not the awareness of consequences to other people or the non-human world (Stern et al., 1993, as cited in Clark et al. 2003, p. 238).

To conclude, both internal and external factors contribute to pro-environmental behavior or lack thereof. Both marketers and psychologists have aimed to provide their explanations for such behavior, but some scholars argue that an interdisciplinary perspective is needed to assess such complex forms of human and consumer behavior. (Clark et al., 2003.)

2.4.2 Sustainable consumer segment

Defining a sustainable consumer segment has been in the interest of marketers for decades. However, traditional segmenting seems complicated in the context of sustainable consumption, since demographic factors only partially affect

environmental attitudes and knowledge, but do not seem to affect environmental behavior. This could be explained due to the situational nature of environmental inclination, where people who are negatively affected by or at risk of such effects of environmental causes tend to be more knowledgeable and act in a pro-environmental manner (Diamantopoulos et al. 2003).

McDonald et al. (2012) in their article, that forms a typology of sustainable consumers argue, that sustainable consumers need to be studied and understood in the wider context of multiple purchase and behavioral decisions, taking into account their motivations and philosophies that drive them. Based on their findings the researchers argue that there is no consumer that is entirely green. The amount of people's green behavior can vary, but all of the study subjects still presented some 'grey', that is, not sustainable, behaviors even though green options would have been available.

2.5 Intention-behavior gap

As sustainable practices and consumer intention to consume sustainable products have been studied, it seems that consumers tend to report such intention but often do not eventually behave like that despite the intention (Hassan et al., 2016; Kollmuss & Agyeman, 2002; Moisander, 2007). This phenomenon, often termed the behavior-intention gap, has been attributed to a variety of factors, that will be discussed here. In the context of this research, discussing the intention-behavior gap can aid in understanding customers and their concerns better, for instance by building an understanding of what keeps consumers from fulfilling the intention so that this factor could be removed or changed. Such behavior has been detected also among holiday travel (see e.g., Becken, 2007; Higham & Cohen, 2011), which will be discussed in closer detail later.

2.5.1 Explanations for the behavior-intention gap

Hassan et al. (2016) have reviewed of extant research on the intention-behavior gap and concluded that such a gap emerges based on the literature. The theory of planned behavior is an extension to the abovementioned theory of reasoned action (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980, as cited in Kollmuss & Agyeman, 2002, pp. 242-243). It has been

developed by Ajzen (1991) and has been applied in Hassan et al.'s (2016) framework and offered as a possible explanation for the intention-behavior gap: intention contributes to consumer decision-making and so does perceived behavioral control – a consumer's perceived ability to control their behavior to reach the desired outcome. Lin's (2016) findings also support the notion that perceived behavioral control correlates with carbon reduction. However, Hassan et al. (2016) concludes that much research needs to be done to comprehend the motivational journey from intentions to actions.

Johnstone and Tan (2015) use qualitative methods to explore what barriers consumers identify related to consumption of green household cleaning products and the findings suggest that the consumers' green perceptions affect their behavior. The research names three key findings: according to consumers being green is too hard, there is a stigma surrounding green consumer behavior and thirdly, reservations surrounding green behavior due to cynicism towards the effects of green products as opposed to conventional ones. (Johnstone & Tan, 2015.)

Furthermore, Moisander (2007) has explored the motivational complexity of green consumerism. She argues, that due to the complex nature of environmental issues, consumers have a difficult time navigating the multiple sides of the issue and the complex ethical issues related to them. This, according to the researcher is too much to ask of the consumer and she describes the expectations posed on the consumer as follows:

“In public discourse, however, green consumes are still often expected to perform the role of goal-conscious decision makers who engage in ‘rational’ household management. Consumers are expected to carefully monitor their shopping practices and know their options as well as engage in systematic reusing, reducing and recycling behaviours. Often they are also expected to influence their peers and be active in civic organizations, raising people's eco-awareness, collecting names for petitions and writing letters and emails to politicians, demanding that governments and firms take responsibility.”
(Moisander, 2007, p. 408)

On a similar note, Markkula and Moisander (2011) argue that consumers struggle to turn existing knowledge about sustainable consumption choices into action due to the perplexity and polyphony in the current sustainable consumption discourses. Gjerris

et al. (2016), too, have explored the multifaceted nature of making more sustainable dietary choices. They discuss eating local, eating organic, and following a vegan diet, for instance, from the viewpoint of conflicting information and ethical trade-offs and conclude that for a consumer it is a complex choice. Furthermore, after the thorough considerations, this choice also needs to be realized in the shopping situation, where other factors such as price and convenience affect the decision-making process, too. Additionally, according to Valor (2008), consumers tend to view sustainable consumption as “a time consuming activity, economically disadvantageous, and stressful” (p. 323). In the vein of Moisander (2007), considering all this evidence, critical consumption could be argued to be a very complex form of consumer behavior, both from the practical and moral perspectives.

It is also to be noted, that some researchers believe survey techniques are partially the cause for the extant gap. Auger and Devinney (2007) point out, that much research related to critical consumer behavior relies on self-reported accounts of buying behavior instead of observing actual buying behavior. This may result in research participants answering in a way they think is most socially acceptable instead of being entirely truthful, a phenomenon called the social desirability bias (Carrington et al., 2010). Other research design factors possible influencing results include the vagueness of scale, like Auger and Devinney note, referring to a study where 70% of respondents stated that a company’s business ethics had ‘some influence’ on their purchase behavior, which might mean different things to different respondents. Due to these reasons, the writers encourage other researchers to design their studies carefully so that the results would be as reliable as possible (Auger & Devinney, 2007).

2.5.2 Closing the intention-behavior gap

As the drivers and barriers for more sustainable and critical forms of consumption have been studied, some suggestions have been made as for how the intention-behavior gap should be closed, or more broadly, how people could be directed to adopt more sustainable ways and forms of consumption. Promoting pro-environmental behavior is often based on campaigns that spread and share information (McKenzie-Mohr et al., 2012, p. 3). While campaigns like this can spread awareness and promote attitude change among people (McKenzie-Mohr et al., 2012 p. 3), they have been evaluated to

eventually be an ineffective method in promoting behavior change (Kollmuss & Agyeman, 2002). However, some scholars advocate for effective behavior change through community-based social marketing (McKenzie-Mohr et al., 2012 p. 3; Schultz, 2014) which has been used for instance in anti-smoking public health campaigns to promote change in behavior (Kollmuss & Agyeman, 2002).

Schultz's (2014) model for behavior change through community-based social marketing follows certain steps. The community aspect refers to the programs taking place within different communities, whether they be geographical or for instance workplace-related in their nature. First, among this community, the target behavior that ought to be changed is identified, as well as barriers and benefits that interfere with or promote the possible change in behavior. This is followed by developing a program that aims to highlight the benefits and diminish the barriers and use effective behavior change tools such as prompts and convenience to change the desired behavior. After this follows a phase of small-scale pilot testing and adjusting, and finally, stages of implementation in the larger scale, and eventually, evaluation of success. The specific tools to be implemented change from community to community based on the experienced barriers and benefits for behavior change. (Schultz, 2014.)

Common ground with Schultz's (2014) work focusing on communities can be distinguished in Moisander (2007), where it is argued that instead of focusing on the individual consumer level, environmental policy should focus on entire communities and these communities should be addressed with their specific cultures and circumstances in mind.

Some scholars, instead of trying to find ways to change consumer behavior, have come to the conclusion, that marketers cannot do enough to steer consumers into sustainable forms of consumption and instead suggest that policymakers act as the drivers for change. Black et al. (2017) criticize the individualist consumption-centered modern society and suggest policies that would steer people away from consumerism into fostering closer relationships and community. These suggestions include regulating marketing in civic spaces and towards vulnerable groups of people, like children, and adding labels to products that inform consumers about the resources used to produce the product at hand. It is also argued that in the current narrative, where businesses

steer consumers towards consumption, it has been made difficult for consumers to reduce or quit consuming goods (Black et al., 2016).

In a similar vein, Gjerris et al. (2016) discuss the citizen-consumer hybrid and the scope of the issues that can be addressed by means of mere consumption and side with Akenji (2014) in that the responsibility of sustainable consumer behavior is too heavy a burden for the individual consumer. Gjerris et al. (2016) therefore suggest highlighting the roles of people as citizens and limiting the consumer choices by for instance taking goods that are deemed unsustainable out of the market. Other means of increasing the sustainability agenda among consumer choices, such as taxation and labelling are suggested by the researchers too.

Since research suggests that predicting pro-environmental behavior can be complicated, it might lead to costly investments among companies that do not ultimately pay off (Carrington et al., 2010). In order to understand customers' sustainable tendencies better, the intention-behavior gap among other issues in sustainable consumption ought to be studied. Furthermore, ways to close the gap can aid marketers as well as policymakers in driving more a sustainable future.

3 HOLIDAY TRAVEL AND SUSTAINABILITY

In this chapter of the thesis, holiday travel and sustainability will be discussed. Firstly, the environmental impacts of tourism will be examined. Then, some sustainably inclined forms of tourism will be shortly presented as will the evidence of the intention-behavior gap among holiday travel. Lastly, barriers and enablers that might affect consumers' sustainable holiday travel tendencies will be presented.

Sustainable holiday travel, in the context of this research, refers to traveling to a destination in a sustainable manner. It is to be noted, that this research is concerned with mostly the transportation to and from the holiday destination(s), whereas sometimes sustainable holiday travel can be linked to for instance traveling to naturally remarkable locations or staying in lodging that highlights sustainability.

3.1 Climate impacts of holiday travel

The emissions of air travel currently constitute only 2,5 per cent of global carbon dioxide emissions but they are estimated to grow by around four to five per cent in the coming decades (Grote et al., 2014). Aside from carbon dioxide, other emissions of air travel also contribute to climate change, resulting in air travel constituting for approximately four per cent of total emissions that warm the climate (Suomen ympäristökeskus, 2019). Furthermore, air travel has a significant impact on a person's carbon footprint (Büchs, 2017) and mostly people in affluent countries travel by air, resulting in 15 per cent of the world's population constituting 82 per cent of leisure related transport emissions globally (Gössling, 2002). Transport accounts for the majority of tourism-generated emissions, more precisely 94 percent, while accommodation and activities amount for the remaining six percent (Gössling, 2002). Therefore, reducing air travel and finding new ways to travel during holidays could be one influential way of promoting more sustainable tourism and a more sustainable future in general (Büchs, 2017).

Due to the international nature of aviation, it is not included in for instance the Kyoto protocol, that demands nations to adopt certain greenhouse gas targets (Becken, 2007). Because there is a lack of regulation, reducing air travel related emissions is currently

individual consumers' responsibility (Barr et al. 2010) since scholars estimate, that considering the growth projections of the aviation sector, new technologies and other mitigation strategies are not enough to answer the need for emission reduction (Peeters et al., 2016). However, whether consumers do want to adopt this role can be questioned. Barr et al. (2010) join Becken (2007) in the notion that modern tourism, enabled by low-cost flights has been cemented as an inseparable part to the modern lifestyle.

It is also to be noted, that as climate change progresses, its effects, too, can have effects on tourism and the behavior of tourists. Gössling et al. (2012) discuss this in their thorough analysis of the consequences, examining the possible effects of climate-change induced changes as well as the effects of measures that will be taken to try and mitigate the effects of climate change. The research points out that aside from climate-change dependent aspects (such as snow coverage in skiing destination and state of coral reefs in diving destinations), other aspects are also relevant in choosing a destination. Furthermore, the destinations affected by the effects of climate change may come up with other means to make up for these changes. However, the researchers note, that more research is needed to assess the complex nature of changes caused directly and indirectly by climate change in relation to its effects on tourism. (Gössling et al. 2012.)

3.2 Sustainably inclined tourism

As discussions of sustainability increase, so does the interest towards incorporating sustainability in all sorts of human behavior. Even though some research has argued that most of the discussions about leading a more sustainable lifestyle is linked to behaviors at home (Barr et al., 2010), others note that the tourism sector has also recognized the need for more sustainable alternatives for conventional tourism (Dolnicar & Leisch, 2008). In the following chapters, different directions of sustainable tourism will be discussed.

3.2.1 Eco-tourism

Eco-tourism is a branch of tourism, defined by The International Ecotourism Society as “responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment, sustains the well-being of the local people, and involves interpretation and education (What is ecotourism?, n.d.)”. The society’s principles include principles such as minimizing impacts of the tourism, generating revenue to local communities and providing financially to conservation efforts, among others (What is ecotourism?, n.d.). It has been assumed that tourists engaging in eco-tourism tend to act more environmentally friendly and that therefore providing more eco-tourism alternatives would lessen the environmental impacts of tourism (Dolnicar & Leisch, 2008). Furthermore, research has found that eco-tourism that incorporates education about the significance of the conservation of certain areas can not only raise awareness among tourist but also change attitudes and behavioral intentions towards supporting conservation efforts and towards general pro-environmental behavior (Powell & Ham, 2008).

However, it is to be noted that eco-tourism might also have negative sides to it. In a meta-analysis of 470 eco-tourism related studies, Wondirad (2019) concludes that eco-tourism, if not implemented with sufficient rigor, could be just a marketing tagline. Additionally, taking into account the context in which eco-tourism endeavors take place has significance too. The article problematizes for instance the application of Western-based models in the contexts of developing countries.

It is also to be noted that eco-tourism seems often to be concerned with the actions in the destination. For instance, Costa Rica became a popular eco-tourism destination at the end of the last millennia, increasing the number of tourists from 250 000 in 1987 to 1 million in 1999 (Almeyda et al., 2010). However, tourists coming to Latin America from Europe or the USA most likely had to fly to get to their destination, resulting in significant carbon emissions and, strictly interpreting the principles of The International Eco-Tourism Society, therefore going against the principles of minimizing the impacts of such tourism.

3.2.2 Slow travel movement

According to Dickinson et al. (2011), the slow travel movement has emerged as an answer to the need for reducing emissions of tourism. Often associated with the ‘slow food’ movement, slow travel is a form of travel where trains, coaches, biking, and walking are preferred over travelling by air or by private car. Being a new phenomenon, however, no strict definitions of what modes of transport facilitate slow travel have been established thus far. The novelty of the phenomenon is reflected in for instance that the writers do not discuss ferries in closer detail since at the time of writing their emission rates were uncertain. Embracing the certain mode of travel, enjoying the human interaction, changing landscapes and different cultures are central to the phenomenon of slow travel, as is the avoidance of emissions while traveling. Dickinson et al. divide slow travelers to two categories, namely hard and soft slow travelers. Hard slow travelers are motivated to engage in slow travel due to the environmental implications of the choice in comparison to other modes of transport. Soft slow travelers, on the other hand, are individuals that are environmentally aware, but choose slow travel because of the experimental aspects of traveling, while also flying and driving on other holidays or as parts of otherwise slow travel holidays. Dickinson et al. also advocate for creating a conceptualization of slow travel as a low-carbon choice for tourists. (Dickinson et al., 2011.)

In another study looking at slow travel and non-slow travel tourists’ justification of their modal choice in relation to climate change, Dickinson et al. (2010) discuss the structural barriers that are related to adopting low-carbon travel behaviors. These barriers can appear for example in the limited access to tourist destinations, making the use of a car necessary, and in the travel package offering of low-carbon options being significantly more expensive than high-carbon options, therefore encouraging flying for financial reasons. Therefore, the writers call for a thorough analysis of tourism structures aside from the transport infrastructure.

Lumsdon and McGrath (2011) have proposed a conceptual framework for slow travel based on a series of interviews with industry experts. In this framework, slowness, travel experience and environmental consciousness are distinguished as integral factors that set slow travel apart from conventional travel. This framework will be

examined more closely in the Chapter 3.4 and proposed as a possible explanation of the enabling factors that contribute to consumers engaging in sustainable travel.

3.3 Holiday travel and the intention-behavior gap

According to researchers, the intention-behavior gap is prevalent also when it comes to reducing voluntary flights and cutting down emissions on holidays, as the current chapter will present. Understanding consumer travel behavior can also help in promoting environmentally friendlier modes of transport and therefore studying the intention-behavior gap in the context of tourism is essential.

Becken (2007) discusses that the role of increasing tourist knowledge about the effects of air travel on the climate could be beneficial in raising awareness, but not enough to ultimately change behavior. The tourists in Becken's study reported more concern towards environmental matters at home instead of on holidays. Additionally, it was concluded that the interviewees admitted that air travel is currently unsustainably affordable but were nonetheless enjoying the personal benefits related to it.

Higham and Cohen (2011), in their interviews of Norwegian long-haul flyers, identified the existence of an intention-behavior-gap in that the interviewees recognized the effects of their flying behavior on the climate, and felt that the issue should be addressed. However, the interviewees seemed reluctant to forgo air travel for the climate's sake.

Similarly, research has identified that in addition to the intention-behavior gap, there is a gap between "home" and "away" among individuals who travel by plane voluntarily, and that in tourism spaces people are less likely to think about the environmental consequences of their actions than in their everyday lives (Cohen et al., 2013). Barr et al. (2010) interviewed holiday flyers who acted environmentally friendly at home and some of whom even took environmental matters in consideration during their holidays. The research found that even the most environmentally committed did not think they would reduce their flying behaviors, instead they reported they would pay emission off-sets and increased taxes, should these become mandatory economical instruments posed by governments to reduce flying (Barr et al.,

2010). This suggests that there are foundational barriers to abandoning aviation even among the environmentally inclined individuals (Cohen et al., 2011). These barriers will be more closely examined in the following chapter.

3.4 Possible barriers to sustainable holiday travel

According to the literature review, there seem to be barriers when it comes to tourists changing aviation for more sustainable modes of travel. Dickinson et al. (2010) introduce the structural barriers in tourism that do not support slow travel (see part 3.1.2) and could therefore discourage modal change for low-carbon options. Furthermore, the researchers distinguished, in their interviews, that non-slow travelers started planning their trip by first deciding the destination, then solving how to get there, whereas slow travelers first decided the mode of transport and then where they could get to regarding the available time and other constraints. As similar constraints were often also applicable in the case of the non-slow travelers, this resulted in them flying to reach the destination. This difference in trip planning made the researchers conclude that slow travelers conceptualize tourism differently, and contrastively, it is also linked with how tourism and destinations are currently being marketed.



Figure 2. Continuum of air travel carbon consciousness. Adapted from Higham and Cohen (2011).

Another factor that might become a barrier for abandoning flying is the love that tourists express for travelling (Higham & Cohen, 2011). In their interviews of Norwegian long-haul flyers, the researchers identified that habits of flying were deeply ingrained, and that people also seemed reluctant towards changing them. It is to be noted that in the research, the Norwegian tourists also showed what the researchers named “carbon conscience”, referring to people who fly but acknowledge the impacts of flying, instead of denying the climatic effects of flying that some other studies (e.g., Hares et al., 2010) have identified. Based on their results, Higham and Cohen (2011) therefore conceptualized a continuum of air travel carbon consciousness (see Figure 2).

Hergesell and Dickinger (2013) surveyed around 370 students about the effects of price, time and convenience on their holiday travel mode choice. For the survey respondents, price was the most important factor when choosing the mode of travel, followed by travel time. Convenience was not of such high significance to the respondents. Interestingly, the study suggested that after a certain travel distance, respondents tended to favor airplanes and cars over trains, whereas for shorter distances the train might have been a viable mode choice. Additionally, the respondents reported environmental friendliness also seemed to affect the travel mode choice in that people who reported acting in less environmentally friendly manners were more likely to opt for cars and planes as travel mode choice.

It is noteworthy that flying has become normative, especially in affluent countries, where “taking one or more foreign holiday each year – increasingly to a long-haul destination – has quickly been transformed from an aspiration to an expectation” (Shaw & Thomas, 2006, p. 213). Shaw and Thomas discuss the dilemma, that people tend to think that them giving up flying and thus making a sacrifice does not have any effect if others continue flying – perceptionally voiding the effects of their personal sacrifice. The researchers, based on their interview data, speculate that government interference is needed since people do not seem willing to personally reduce their flying behavior. This is supported by the findings of McKercher and Prideaux (2011) which show that behavior change related to tourism is low on hospitality field students’ personal agendas and that they do not see it as a major concern in driving climate change.

Gössling et al. (2019) also discuss the normalization of flying and aviation organizations’ and airlines’ role in it. It is argued, that by, for example, discussing the number of individual flights as if it were the number of individual passengers, these actors make flying seem like something that everyone is doing, even though it is often individual frequent flyers making several trips a year who inflate the numbers. Researchers evaluate that scapegoating governments and other actors, (as reported in e.g. Becken, 2007 and Hares et al. 2010) will become more difficult among cultural discussions of flight shame. In their study, the researchers studied an international student sample about the perceived importance of their flights. The subjects were asked to evaluate the necessity of their flights and as a result, 42% of all flights and

48% of leisure flights were deemed either ‘indifferent’, ‘limited importance’ or ‘no importance at all’. Flights to visit home, friends and family, and flights related to education were rated most important by the respondents. Notably, much of the less important flights were motivated by the affordable prices, as the students reported purposely looking for bargains. (Gössling et al., 2019.)

3.5 Possible enablers to sustainable holiday travel

In contrast to the last chapter, in this chapter the possible enablers to sustainable holiday travel will be examined. Based on the researcher’s literature review the studies related to sustainable travel are mostly related to behavior change away from more unsustainable forms of travel as well as the abovementioned barriers to such change, and not as much the factors that encourage sustainable travel.

In order to formulate some understanding as to what these enablers could be, characterizations of slow travel as opposed to conventional travel as provided by Lumsdon and McGrath (2011) can offer insight into what encourages tourists to use slow, low-carbon modes of transport in their travels. The researchers propose a framework for slow travel and in this framework, the factors that are seen as central to slow travel are the characteristics of a slow, unhurried journey, the experience that includes interactions with other people and enjoying landscape as well as the environmental consciousness of the mode of travel that is the result of slower transport mode choices. Interestingly, the researchers are not certain whether the last feature is a core element that directs travel choice rather than an additional advantage.

4 LOW-CARBON TRAVEL PERCEPTION FRAMEWORK

Drawing from the theory discussed in the previous chapters, a theoretical framework is presented, that attempts to illustrate the factors that affect consumers' overall perceptions, and more specifically barriers and enablers related to low-carbon holiday travel. In this part of the research, a figure that has been formed to portray the theories discussed earlier and their relations will be discussed in detail.

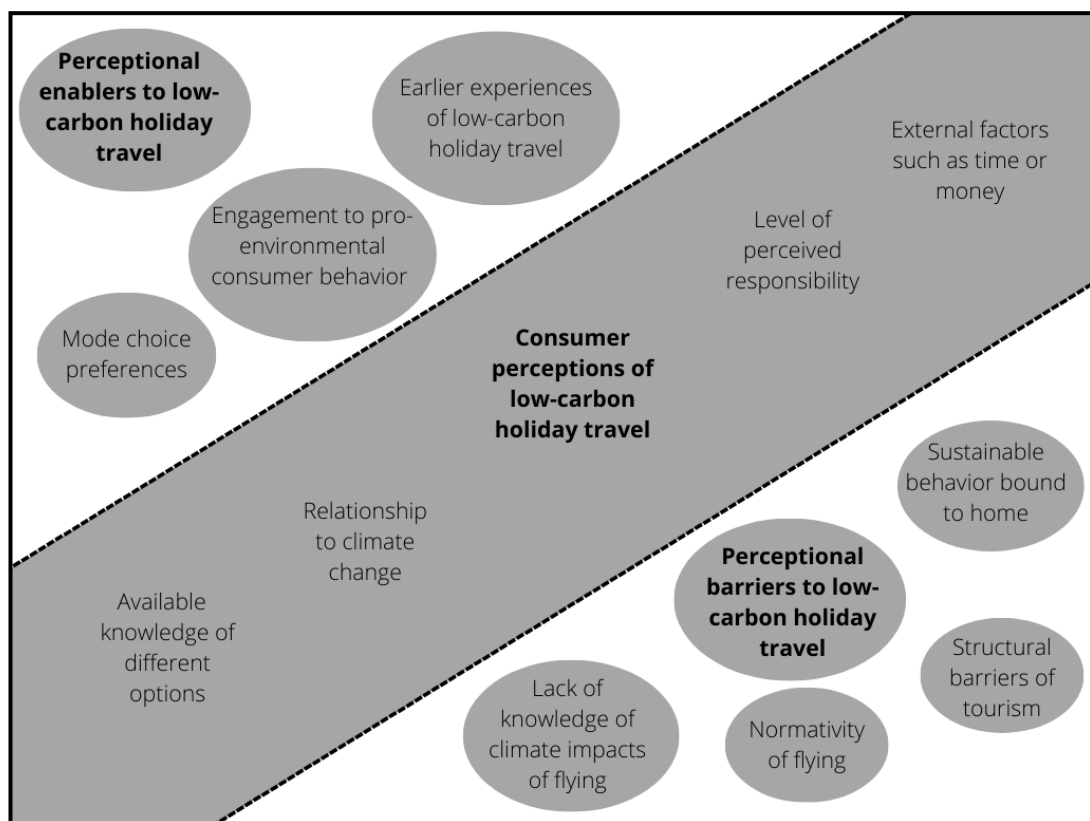


Figure 3. Consumer perceptions and perceptual barriers and enablers to low-carbon holiday travel framework

In the Figure 3, the researcher has theorized which factors can affect consumers' perceptions of low-carbon holiday travel and furthermore the perceptual barriers and enablers related to it. This framework is based on the literature review presented in the earlier chapters of the thesis.

Firstly, it is assumed that an individual's *relationship to climate change* contributes to whether a person is also inclined towards or motivated to engage in low-carbon travel, which can be regarded as more environmentally friendly than aviation. For example,

if a person does not believe in climate change, they will most likely not be motivated to choose products or services with a lesser climate impact. On the other hand, an individual with *high engagement in climate change prevention* is more likely to at least attempt to consume goods with pro-environmental characteristics. This relationship to climate change, whether it be towards or against such behavior can affect the perceptions related to low-carbon holiday travel.

Furthermore, the theories used to explain the intention-behavior gap can explain the perceptions of low-carbon travel too, such as the theories of perplexity of knowledge about pro-environmental behavior (see e.g., Gjerris et al. 2016; Moisander, 2007; Markkula & Moisander, 2011) and the perceptions of being green being too hard or having a negative stigma (Johnstone & Tan, 2015). If an individual has little or much *knowledge of available options* it can affect their behavior. However, other *external factors such as time or money* available can also affect behavior.

It is also theorized that consumers may *perceive a certain level of personal responsibility* to act in a way that they believe will change the world for the better in one way or another. This behavior of “voting with one’s dollar” and the belief that it is what one must do, can affect the perceptions one has towards low-carbon travel and the barriers one feels there are that hinder such behavior.

Studies that have examined peoples’ flying habits have recognized that some people tend to diminish the effects of their flying because they do not believe in climate change (Hares et al., 2010). Based on Higham and Cohen’s (2011) continuum of travel carbon consciousness (see Figure 2) it is distinguished that also consumers’ belief and attitude towards climate change can affect the perceptions of low-carbon travel and the barriers associated with it. *Being unaware of the climate impacts of flying* can be a simple reason for such behavior.

Perceived effects of one’s own actions are also linked to this, for instance, the idea that *sustainable behavior is bound to home*. Cohen et al. (2013) and Barr et al. (2010) both report that tourists separate actions ‘home’ and ‘away’ and some think that pro-environmental behavior is linked to actions at home more so than on a holiday, also

taking a holiday from environmentally friendly behavior when they are away from home.

Structural barriers of tourism are conceptualized by Dickinson et al. (2010) who argue that the way tourism is currently structured does not support low-carbon travel, from the lack of low-carbon options in travel agencies to the separated nature of train ticket booking sites and the length of holidays. *Normativity of flying* is also related to this, discussed by for instance Gössling et al. (2019) in how airlines and aviation organizations market flying as the common norm. It is also reported by Dickinson et al. (2010) in how most consumers approach planning holidays starting from the destination, as opposed to slow travelers who start from deciding the mode of travel.

It is also recognized that *preference for a certain mode of travel* can affect the perceptions of slow travel. Dickinson et al. (2011) interview avid slow travelers for whom, for instance, biking is an essential motivation for planning of the journey. Furthermore, *earlier experiences of low-carbon holiday travel* can encourage such travel in the future.

It seems unlikely that an individual consumer would exhibit that all of the factors presented in the figure would affect the individual perceptions. However, these factors can partially explain how such perceptions and perceptual barriers are formed and what enablers affect the perceptions too. The empirical part will give further insight into whether some other factors also affect these processes.

5 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In this part of the research, the methods used in the research are discussed. The chosen methods for data collection and analysis are justified and the sampling process, the sample itself and data collection process are presented and justified.

5.1 Method choice

Qualitative research allows the researcher to understand the contexts and the social and cultural setting in which people live (Myers, 2013, p. 4). As this study aims to explore the multitudes of consumer perceptions towards low-carbon holiday travel, qualitative methods were deemed suitable to study such a phenomenon. As an explorative inquiry into consumer perceptions, the study takes an interpretive approach, which is concerned with human sense-making in different, emergent situations (Kaplan & Maxwell, 1994 as cited in Myers, 2013, p. 39). As qualitative data can offer subjective insights into complex phenomena (Auerbach & Silverstein, 2003, p. 22), it is a suitable approach for analyzing the perceptions of consumers, which can indeed be complex and context-dependent in their nature. This research adopts an abductive approach, where the theoretical framework is modified as a result of the insights gained during the empirical analysis (Dubois & Gadde, 2002).

5.2 Data collection

The qualitative data was collected by conducting focus group interviews and recording them. Focus group interviews are group discussions often used in the marketing field to give insight with regards to people's attitudes of a particular product or a service (Wilson, 2010, p. 144). In addition to focus groups being an effective form of interviewing, they can enable ideas and thoughts to emerge from participant interaction (Wilson, p. 144). This became evident during the interviews since participant engagement provided interesting additional interactions among the participants that generated data. The interview questions were semi-structured in their nature, enabling the focus group moderator to ask additional questions to expand and encourage the participants to elaborate further.

In order to gather meaningful data, the interview questions need to be carefully designed. The interviewees' environmentally inclined consumption tendencies were discussed by asking general questions pertaining to sustainable consumer behavior. From the general questions, a shift to more specific questions followed, related to holiday travel tendencies and thoughts about different modes of travel. To stimulate thoughts among the interviewees, a comparison of emissions for different modes of transportation was presented during the interview, as well as a short route guide for a train holiday trip from Finland to Paris, France. It is to be noted, when discussing subjects of moral complexity, that interviewees might be biased to report behaviors and intentions that are socially more acceptable (Becken, 2007). Therefore, the questions need to be designed keeping this aspect in mind. Johnstone and Tan (2015) have done this by asking generalized questions such as "why do you think some consumers choose not to buy green products?" (p. 315) and by highlighting that the researchers are interested to hear insights also from people that *do not* buy green products. These approaches were adopted for this study as well.

The present study aims to illustrate consumers' perceptions of the emergent phenomenon of low-carbon travel and also to explore the barriers and enablers they attach to it. For the purpose of this qualitative study, a combination of convenience sampling and quota sampling was utilized. Convenience sampling was utilized when readily available participants among the researcher's acquaintances were asked to participate, but in an attempt to broaden the representativeness of the sample, other people were invited to join the focus group discussions via University of Oulu's student mailing lists and social media posts, using quota sampling. The limited representativeness of the sample used is recognized and discussed in further detail in the limitations section (see Chapter 7.4), but the sampling technique is utilized due to its practical and affordable characteristics which were essential in the context of this master's thesis, where resources are limited. These sampling methods proved to be effective in that the researcher was able to gather needed interviewees within a reasonable timeframe.

The five focus group interviews, each consisting of three participants, were conducted between February 26th, 2021 and March 12th, 2021. Due to the global COVID-19 pandemic, the interviews were conducted virtually on the online video-call platform

Zoom and recorded. Information about the participants' year of birth, gender and highest obtained degree were collected and it is presented along with the make-up of each focus group in Table 1. Altogether 15 individuals, five of whom were male and ten of whom were women, participated in the interviews, that lasted approximately from around 40 minutes to around 90 minutes. During the interviews, some materials related to international train travel and the emissions of travel were shown to the participants to generate discussion among them. The facilitator presented the materials and the interview questions and asked specifying questions when needed. The recorded materials were transcribed and analyzed. The results of the analysis will be discussed in the following chapter.

	Pseudonym	Gender	Year of Birth (Age in 2021)	Highest Degree Obtained
Focus Group 1				
	F1P1	Female	1996 (25)	Bachelor's degree
	F1P2	Male	1998 (23)	High school diploma
	F1P3	Male	1994 (27)	Bachelor's degree
Focus Group 2				
	F2P1	Female	1988 (33)	High school diploma
	F2P2	Female	1994 (27)	Master's degree
	F2P3	Female	1983 (38)	Bachelor's degree
Focus Group 3				
	F3P1	Male	1992 (29)	Master's degree
	F3P2	Male	1995 (26)	Bachelor's degree
	F3P3	Male	1986 (35)	Master's degree
Focus Group 4				
	F4P1	Female	1997 (24)	Bachelor's degree
	F4P2	Female	1992 (29)	Master's degree
	F4P3	Female	1997 (24)	High school diploma
Focus Group 5				
	F5P1	Female	1996 (25)	Bachelor's degree
	F5P2	Female	1994 (27)	Master's degree
	F5P3	Female	1996 (25)	High school diploma

Table 1. List of focus group participants

5.3 Data analysis

The data gathered by way of focus group interviews was transcribed and coded using inductive coding, where the codes emerge from the transcribed material (Wilson, 2010, p. 258). The material was read through multiple times carefully and based on the

interviewees' transcribed comments, codes were assigned to them. Some comments touched upon various subject matters and multiple codes were assigned to them whereas some were marked with only one. After the initial coding, the most important topics with regards to the research questions were gathered and the analysis chapters were formed based on them. During the analysis, the codes were edited and added as needed and as new points of interest emerged from the material. The results of the interview transcriptions' analysis are presented in the following chapter. To illustrate the phenomena that emerged from the analysis, some excerpts from the interviews have been translated by the researcher from Finnish into English and used as examples in the analysis section.

6 RESEARCH FINDINGS

In this part of the thesis, the results of the analysis, based on the five qualitative interviews with the focus groups will be presented, discussed, and compared with theories discussed in the earlier chapters of this thesis. The results of the analysis are divided into different parts. Firstly, the interview results in general will be discussed as well as the context-dependent nature of transport mode choice apparent from the interviews. Then, enablers and barriers that were identified based on the analysis will be presented. Finally, the theoretical framework presented earlier will be revised based on the results of the empirical research related to the subject.

The discussions that took place are from the Finnish context and Finland's location to in relation to other parts Europe, it being surrounded mostly by the Baltic Sea affects the possibilities of traveling abroad without flying. All but one study participants were living in different parts of Finland when the interviews took place, while the one participant was living in Switzerland. Some other participants also had prior experiences of living abroad in other parts of Europe due to studies or work.

6.1 General discussion about the findings

All in all, the interview participants all reported having concern for the climate and seemed familiar with the themes of climate change and the emissions of their everyday actions. No climate change denialism was reported among the sample. The interviewees reported both having made changes to their everyday habits and contemplating what more they could do for the climate. Even though some of the interviewees reported being very devout regarding pro-environmental behavior, parallels to McDonald et al. (2012) could be detected since all of the interviewees expressed that they had some aspects where they did not act entirely green.

The high level of reported commitment to pro-environmental behavior could be explained with the sampling method. It was said in the call for participants that the focus group discussions would revolve around practices of low-carbon emission holiday travel. Even though it was also announced that no prior interest or information

pertaining to the subject was needed, it may be that sustainably inclined individuals were the most motivated and interested to join a discussion related to such topics.

Based on the interviews it could be concluded that holidays where no plane transport is used are in a category of their own according to the interviews and serve different kinds of needs than plane holidays for instance. The tight schedules of work and studies and the demanding nature the interviewees assign for train travel makes it a less accessible or desirable option for travel in the eyes of some interviewees. The ones who do not find it undesirable still assign it qualities that differentiate it from plane holidays, such as extensive preparations and its effect on destination.

Among the interviewees' comments, differences in attitudes regarding travel by land and by air can be distinguished. Dickinson (2011) discusses the importance of destination for typical tourist as opposed to the importance of the journey among avid slow travelers which can be also distinguished in some of the interviewees. Interestingly, there seemed to be at least two methods for how trips were planned among the interviewees: one, where first the destination was defined, and the trips were planned around it. This was used usually when meeting friends or relatives who reside in a certain place was the motive for the trip, or when deciding to go to an interesting destination that would fit the budget and the time available. On the other hand, a committed low-carbon traveler reported that the low-carbon transport choices as well as available time defined their chosen destination:

“Usually during the last couple of years, I have thought of destinations which I can reach by car, train, coach or in some cases the ferry. And those as well as the time I have available have defined where I would travel. In some cases, the mode of transport itself has been the basis for the travel plans. One summer I made a hitchhiking trip and planned the routes based on what places were good in terms of hitchhiking.” (F1P1)

This would suggest that for some consumers specifically the environmental factors are what drive them to engage in slow travel instead of a specific preference for slow travel modes, whereas earlier research has suggested that the lesser environmental impacts were merely a welcomed bonus of slow travel (Lumsdon & McGrath, 2011).

As it has been discussed earlier in this thesis, examples of public figures avoiding flying for climate's sake and interest towards train travel and other low-carbon modes of travel have all been increasing. The interviewees have also noticed this phenomenon, which they report having changed their own and their peers' mindsets:

“My last trip abroad was to France and I flew there. After that, in fact, I have thought very much, even more than before, about how I could travel in Europe without flying because I realize that flying is a big burden to the climate.”
(F1P3)

6.2 Context-dependence of the mode of transport

In this part of the findings, an interesting phenomenon that emerged from the findings will be discussed. Based on the interviews, it becomes apparent that choosing the mode of transport one travels with is not without contradictions. Depending on the context, certain modes of transport are favored over other forms and the interviewees seem to seek out modes that would offer certain benefits without compromising on the environmental impacts of the travel mode.

None of the interviewees mention a specific preference or liking to any certain mode of travel, such as preference for biking or hiking. However, some modes of travel are favored over others in certain contexts for various reasons, that will be discussed in this part of the analysis.

When it comes to abstaining from air travel related to international travel, one interviewee differs from the others in her reportedly strong commitment to travelling without planes. She has been hitchhiking and traveling by train abroad and reports that she is committed to using low-carbon travel modes and willing to sacrifice something, such as the ability to go far fast, due to this commitment. However, she simultaneously recognizes an expectation, an exchange across the Atlantic Sea, which would necessitate flying.

“Because I have taken this stand towards traveling by land, I have also realized how it limits my possibilities and it is something I have accepted. If I commit to these modes of travel, it means I will not get to go to many places necessarily. I think about the trips case by case. For example, I applied for an

exchange semester in Canada and was accepted but it was cancelled due to COVID-19. So, I was thinking that I would have to take a long haul flight but also thought that after that I am not going to fly anywhere else.” (F1P1)

The perceived necessity of flying is apparent among other interviewees as well. Interviewees who travel abroad to meet their relatives and friends during holidays and perhaps have a tight schedule due to work, studies, or other commitments report that flying is their mode of choice due to these factors and that giving it up would be too large a sacrifice despite its environmental impacts. Also, price is mentioned as an important factor and the participants often evaluate monetary costs in relation to other travel mode factors such as duration of trip and comfort of the transportation, as well as the ecological impact of transport mode choice:

“Domestically I mainly travel by train because I like it and its ecological nature is the most important aspect for me. Taking a bus or even flying might sometimes be cheaper but taking a bus to somewhere like Helsinki sounds like a nightmarish idea so my indolence plays a role there. And the price... well not as much, I might even take a night train from time to time because it is more comfortable.” (F4P1)

“Price is absolutely the most important thing in choosing the mode of transportation. If I can find an affordable connection even with a layover I am taking it if it has a clear price difference compared to a direct flight. Maybe now that I have been in the working life for a couple of years, I have started thinking that also my time is worth something and therefore I have sometimes bought direct flights.” I have, for sure, thought about that if there is a chance to travel otherwise than by plane, I try to do that, for example I never fly within Finland but if I leave Finland to go abroad, then flying is the only option.” (F4P2)

Lifestyles that necessitate flying combined with the climate conscious attitudes have caused some interviewees to find ways to get to their destinations efficiently but without burdening the climate as much as commonly used jet engine planes do. Among other options, the interviewees have investigated the possibilities of choosing flights that are operated with a propeller engine plane, since they omit less carbon dioxide than jet engine planes. However, this practice is deemed difficult since a flight can, after all, be operated with a regular plane instead of a propeller engine unannounced, which would “ruin the idea of more ecological travel completely” (F4P3). Other options to lessen the environmental impact of travel without raising the travel time

significantly, as discussed by the interviewees, would be avoiding layovers either by taking direct flights or flying halfway and taking the train for the rest of the way.

The relatively high emissions of ferries are something that also frustrate the interviewees since they wonder whether it is virtually any better to use trains and ferries to travel abroad than flying. The travel advice website (Ranska, n.d.) that was used to stimulate discussion during interviews mentions that one ferry which leaves Turku for Stockholm at nighttime uses an eco-friendlier fuel than other ferries operating on the Baltic Sea and at least one interviewee reported prior awareness of this as an option to travel using fewer natural resources.

All in all, while the interviewees seem to be aware of the effects of their actions on the climate and all report paying attention to their habits from the environmental point of view, there seems to be some confusion as to which sources to trust, for instance, related to evaluating the impacts of one's actions. One of interviewees comments the emission comparison chart discussed during the interview as follows:

“Every time I see comparisons like this I can almost be certain that something has been left out or it has been counted in a way that highlights one matter over another. It was said in [Lamminen, 2018] that the plane had 60 per cent of its seats full but how many seats of the train were full and how big was the train to begin with? And the ferry was said to be a car ferry, how does that impact if it had more people and less cars on board? So, how comparable are those numbers? And I also have the impression that while the emissions of ferries might be relatively ok, they cause other kinds of issues in the water system that might have more direct consequences than CO₂ emissions and such have. So, it is a bit difficult to compare those.” (F3P1)

The various aspects the interviewee mentions are an example of the multi-faceted nature of climate change issues, and it could be argued that being able to question such estimates demands some inclination and interest towards climate-change-related topics. One of the interviewees concludes well the frustration and confusion that is apparent from many of the interviewees' comments:

“It would be so nice to always travel by train that does not emit anything and the electricity of which just appears from somewhere without you having to think about it much. But I have also been thinking that the best solution would probably be to never travel anywhere.” (F5P3)

Conclusively, it could be argued that the interviewees experience a similar kind of “discursive confusion” related to navigating sustainable consumption as identified by Markkula and Moisander (2011) related to consumers’ clothing choices. This confusion, according to the researchers is caused due to vast amounts of changing information, which at times can be conflicting. Similarities can be detected when interviewees ponder vehicle choice, sources of energy and the trustworthiness of emission calculations. These issues will be discussed also later in the analysis section, related to the intention-behavior gap.

6.3 Perceived positive sides and enablers of low-carbon holiday travel

Positive factors that the interviewees attach with train travel are similar among all focus group participants. Train travel, and, more generally, avoiding flying when traveling, is seen by the interviewees as a mode of travel that enables exploration of new places also aside from the final destination. The ability to experience the act of traveling in a more concrete way, watching sceneries pass by and the chances of meeting new people and enjoying the journey are repeated in the interviewees’ stories. These perceptions align with Lumsdon and McGrath’s (2011) characteristics of slow travel, where experiences and the concreteness of the journey are considered integral for the travel mode.

“I feel like I would like various aspects of this type of travel. I have always enjoyed the travel portion of trips, especially if I am not in a hurry and I get to watch sceneries. One of the most boring things about plane travel to me is that I am in a sort of a tin can and after a bit I am suddenly in another place, so I do not really even get to understand the geographical relations between places”
(F1P3)

Many interviewees mention their positive experiences of public transport, especially of train travel, in Central and Southern European countries. The interviewees highlight especially the amount of connections and ease of traveling by train within one country and even between countries. Some participants also mention their Interrailing experience and Interrailing is mentioned also by many others as a dream or an idealized picture of an adventurous train trip and the Interrail ticket is referred to as a “key to happiness” (F4P2). Living in the moment and enjoying the journey as well as the destination, getting to spend quality time with travel company and seeing one’s travel

plans come true during the trip are some of the things that the interviewees mention, as possibly positive things in traveling longer distances by train.

As well as Central European rail travel also domestic rail travel is preferred among the interviewees. Notably, when traveling within Finland, almost all interviewees express having the principle or the intention of avoiding domestic flights both in their holiday travels as well as during work-related trips. Public transport on the main routes and in Southern Finland is considered efficient and easy to reach. The time it takes to travel within Finland by train is deemed short enough, especially in comparison to the amount of emissions:

“If the emissions of flying are 200-fold in comparison to train travel and traveling by train from Oulu to Helsinki takes nowadays less than six hours which means the travel time is only six times as long, it would be good if people who fly frequently thought of that because those proportions are kind of wacky.” (F2P1)

When it comes to increasing the likelihood of low-carbon transport mode usage in the future, most interviewees agree that, for instance, train connections should be improved, and aviation should simultaneously become more expensive to justify using slower modes of travel more widely among the common public. Many interviewees discuss the possibilities of a tunnel from Helsinki to Tallinn or one from Turku to Stockholm and what projects like these could enable. Shorter travel time and more fluent connections, as well as better night train options, are factors that interviewees think would encourage increases in future train travel. All in all, as the following quote highlights, most interviewees think positively about future developments regarding low-carbon travel options and seem to think that especially train travel will gain more popularity in the future.

“If now there are the plans for the local train from Kemi to Oulu it would be a big thing that we could get to Tornio fast and [access Europe] via Sweden. And the tunnel project between Tallinn and Helsinki. There are quite a lot of new possibilities in the near future which is positive” (F2P3)

Other interesting ideas that the interviewees think would work for making low-carbon travel more approachable include introducing better services, such as offering low-carbon travel packages and introducing websites where various connections from

different railway companies can be booked simultaneously. Even though such websites are currently the norm when it comes to booking flights, train tickets often need to be bought separately from different sites.

“I think something that would encourage the average consumer towards more eco-friendly or train travel is that it would be made as easy as possible. [F3P2] said that buying a train ticket is usually really easy. Well, maybe for us it is, but maybe not for everyone. So, if the trips were offered as ready-made packages or marketed directly as an experience or it was made as easy as possible so you could just decide to take this train trip to Paris, and everything was taken care of for you so it would be easier and help things for the average consumer” (F3P1)

Examples set by public figures and other tourists who travel across Europe without trains are also viewed as factors that would aid people in adopting greener transportation. It is acknowledged by the interviewees that issues like traveling without planes were not discussed to a similar extent ten years prior and how flying to Central Europe for a quick weekend getaway used to be regarded in a very positive light at that time, but not anymore. Blogs and social media, as well as peers, are also discussed as sources where the interviewees would seek information, tips, and inspiration for such trips:

“I have maybe been in friend groups where people avoid planes when traveling. I have been hitchhiking for a couple of years and when I have looked for tips related to it I have noticed that people hitchhike between countries too and not just within one. And I mentioned the “Maata pitkin matkustavat” Facebook group which has had a significant impact because there I have seen how people take more and longer trips with trains and coaches” (F1P1)

6.4 Perceived negative sides and barriers to low-carbon travel

In this part of the analysis, the barriers that interviewees attach to low-carbon holiday travel will be discussed. These perceived barriers may make low-carbon travel seem unattainable or unattractive to some tourists. These often seem to overlap with what the interviewees consider to be the negative sides of low-carbon travel.

All in all, it could be concluded that while some of them themselves would find traveling without planes an option to consider, for some interviewees and the wider

audiences traveling without planes is not an attainable option. Reasons presented for this are various but the established, normative nature of plane travel that other travel modes are compared to suggest that the length of travel time, more complicated nature and the relative price similarity do not support traveling without planes. While all of the interviewees recognize the much more severe environmental impact of flying, many reach the conclusion that environmental values alone are not enough to motivate most individual tourists to voluntarily opt for travelling without planes in the current situation, like the following excerpt highlights:

“I do not want to be pessimistic, but my first thought is that if you pay 150€ for the travel costs and accommodation which may be around 50€ or 20€ at a hostel we are talking about 170€ to 200€ so with the current prices regrettably flying is at such a similar price point that spending 1 day and 21 hours travelling as opposed to around four hours from Helsinki to Paris is something I would not even consider even if it were more ecological. I would only consider it in a utopian scenario where I would have all the time and the money in the world, and it is not realistic. I would want to say otherwise but it is how it is.” (F4P2)

The interviewees recognize some barriers related to low-carbon travel regarding possible destinations. Places outside of Europe are not even discussed as possible destinations by the interviewees except for the Trans-Siberian railway and in the context of wondering how it could be possible to reach overseas destinations. Domestically, public transportation is not always deemed the best way to travel everywhere either, as noted by some interviewees. Nature destinations such as national parks and hiking destinations are hard to access without a car at one's disposal according to the interviewees, and especially Northern Finland is recognized as a place where a car is needed to get around.

“I use my car to some extent in domestic travel, for example if I visit my parents [in Northern Finland] because there the distances are longer and public transport is worse, but I have to be able to get around when I am there. But whenever I head to Southern Finland I always use public transport because local transport works really well there.” (F2P1)

6.4.1 Attitude for low-carbon travel

When the possibility of traveling from Finland to Paris for a holiday by ferry and by train is discussed, the travel time (1 day and 21 hours as presented in the discussed materials used in the interviews) it is deemed to be too long to justify spending only a couple days in Paris. This thought might arise from the comparison with a usual shorter holiday trip done by plane, where the trip is shorter, justifying for the shorter stay too. Many interviewees say they would combine such a train trip with visits to see international friends or other intermediary stopping points to divide the long continuous travel time into shorter sections.

“The travel time is rather long in the example so it is something one would have to make use of or try and enjoy it. The trip cannot be a one-night-trip to Paris, but one would have to reserve at least two weeks for the trip or something.” (F3P3)

“I do not see myself taking a two-day trip to a single destination, I would rather divide the trip into parts, exploring and staying in places like Southern Sweden for one night and in Germany for the other. [...] If the intention would be to use two entire days for the trip at least my buttocks could not take it” (F3P2)

This would suggest that a different kind of need is being fulfilled during an international train holiday than one where plane travel is utilized. Many interviewees discuss the need to have a certain kind of attitude during a train holiday, an attitude that would ‘allow for’ the trip to take a long time without frustration. This would, according to the interviewees, demand loose schedules that allow for delays and ample time to be spent at the destination.

“[Traveling without planes to a Central European destination] is not entirely realistic because you have to think about accommodation and everything if you cannot sleep on the train or coach. So, it is a bit difficult if you are going to a specific destination like Berlin or Paris so maybe you do not have so much time to use for the travels. But if you are on the holiday simply for the sake of the travel like when you are Interrailing, you are moving from place A to place B to place C so you are roaming around for the joy of it then this is a great idea that you can go to one place first, stay there for the night, then move onto the next one and so on, it is a great idea then” (F4P3)

As for the interviewees that discussed their Interrail trips, both of them had made the choice to fly from Finland to Central Europe first, then embark on their train holidays and later, fly back to Finland at the end of the Interrail trip. They both reported doing this in order to save travel time that they paid for in their ticket. Interestingly, both, like other interviewees, still discuss Interrail trips in a manner that suggest that people who are Interrailing have little to no time constraints and are free to wander how they please, and they highlight the feeling of freedom. This would suggest that there is maybe a difference between the imagined freedom of an Interrail trip and the realities of one, with timely and monetary constraints.

6.4.2 Knowledge and preparation

Furthermore, the interviewees recognize that traveling by train across multiple countries demands some sort of knowledge of independent travel outside of travel agencies. Booking tickets, changing trains, navigating foreign railway stations, and carrying one's luggage as well as solving issues that may come up such as missing a train are all things that the interviewees mention that might make traveling on land less desirable than flying. Also, accessibility is mentioned, and it is recognized that at an airport, customers with special needs are often offered assistance whereas when traveling on other modes a traveler is on their own. It could be concluded that structural issues regarding the complexity of low-carbon travel, are what forms a barrier from the interviewees' viewpoint. This view is supported by the findings of Dickinson et al. (2010).

All of these things lead some interviewees to conclude that while among small groups of (young) adults traveling abroad using ferries, trains and coaches might be a viable option and even an interesting way to travel, it might not be the case for all, for instance people who travel with children or people who have little to no experience of independent travel.

“When you compare traveling by land for several days to traveling from Helsinki to Paris with a direct flight in a couple of hours, I do not think it is a desirable option to an average tourist especially if independent travel is not something they are familiar with. After all, travel agencies still exist, and

someone buys package trips so clearly not everyone possesses the experience needed to travel through Germany and France with such vehicles.” (F3P1)

When it comes to traveling with children, only one interviewee reports having a child but also others seem to think that it would be challenging to travel without flying with children. The role of packing the correct supplies to take with oneself and making sure that suitable foods and snacks are available becomes larger than when interviewees with no children think about the preparation. The interviewee with a child comments as follows:

“I think the biggest challenge would be the logistics of it. We would have to pack a ton of stuff and have to carry that around. We could not use the bus if we did not have the safety seat [for the child] with us and we would have to find out ahead of the time all the spaces we could stay over that accommodate children and where we could get food and if we would have to bring everything with us or if we could buy stuff on the go. That is all something that we are not used to because we did not have a child before so I think it would be the most cumbersome thing when traveling without flying.” (F5P3)

However, also the interviewees with no children to take care of discuss the importance of packing correctly, taking care of food during the trip and having to prepare various other things ahead. While many interviewees mention, how they would find some parts of the preparation enjoyable, also the stressfulness of these preparations is recognized. Again, interviewees mention the need for a certain kind of attitude:

“It is the matter of one’s attitude: it can wear one out to have to sit on a train for long periods of time and one also has to think thoroughly about what to pack and take all kinds of snacks with oneself if they cannot be bought anywhere so good preparation would be important for longer trips.” (F2P3)

Another knowledge-related barrier that interviewees discuss is language. Especially when issues arise or when navigating foreign websites, the idea of operating in an environment where English is not spoken seems to worry some interviewees. Railway stations are also compared with airports in the sense that while airports are international territories with usually English signs to guide tourists, railway stations might not be as straightforward to navigate as a non-native tourist.

6.4.3 Personal sacrifice

During the interviews, the idea of sacrifice and not wanting to give up acquired benefits is often mentioned. In this part of the analysis, this issue is discussed from the various viewpoints it was brought up in the interviews.

When asked about personal responsibility regarding climate change and issues the individual deemed hard to tackle, the one interviewee living in Switzerland recognized that giving up flying would be impossible for her:

“I am in a relationship with a Swiss person who has family in Denmark and my family is in Finland so I feel like giving up flying would be too big a sacrifice due to my close relationships. We fly, well not monthly, but once in two months to either Denmark, Finland or Switzerland and I acknowledge that it forms a big part of our emissions and my partner actually did a small study where they listed all their CO₂ emissions for one year and flying formed for sure the biggest part of them. But it would feel like too big of a sacrifice that I would not see my parents or friends in Finland because I would not want to fly, or I would travel by train and have the holiday shorten significantly because of it.” (F4P2)

Similar importance or necessity can also be assigned to interviewee F1P1's international exchange, which would have potentially resulted in her having to give up her principles of not flying (see part 6.1). Both of these accounts are in line with Gössling et al. (2019)'s inquiry into necessity of flying where flights related to visiting home to see immediate family and flights related to studies were ranked relatively the most important among a student sample.

However, giving up unique touristic experiences is also something the interviewees discuss. This is portrayed well in an anecdote:

“I was very annoyed recently because my partner's mother had promised to take us to New Zealand by plane. I would have been ready to go and compensate for the emissions somehow, but my partner was of the opinion that we should not go. And we ended up agreeing to go to Sweden instead. Which is nice, for sure, but it is not New Zealand.” (F5P3)

While here the interviewee has agreed to give up a long-haul holiday, and the interviewees in general report changing habits for climate change, the interviewees

also recognize that it is challenging to change behavior and mindsets related to consumption. One interviewee concludes:

“Acquired benefits are really hard to give up and we might have a distorted image with regards to how much things cost and how much they ought to cost. We are used to being able to travel all around the world by plane and we are used to cheap electronics made in China with slave pay which could not be offered at those rates if climate change and human rights issues were taken into account. But we are used to it, they are available, and we have the possibility to buy them at those prices. So, it is really hard to start thinking about it from a new perspective and take into account everything and accept that the prices would be four to five times higher possibly.” (F3P1)

This idea of people in general not being willing to give up certain behaviors that might be harmful for the climate since they are still available for consumption results in the interviewees suggesting political measures such as taxes to guide people toward less emission-intensive forms of transportation. This is what many scholars suggest too and have found that also interviewed individuals agree with these sentiments (for example Gössling et al, 2019; Higham & Cohen, 2011)

This discussion could be argued to be related to the idea discussed in Chapter 6.3 of environmental values not being important enough for the majority of people to change. Essentially sacrificing one's own money, time, and other resources for the sake of the climate might be too abstract or too great a burden at the individual level. In line with Becken's (2007) findings, the interviewees also seem to think that voluntary behavior change is too much to expect of people in general. This idea of voluntary sacrifice being too hard might partially also explain the intention-behavior gap that will be discussed next.

6.4.4 Intention-behavior gap

As intention-behavior gap is an often discussed issue regarding pro-environmental behavior and it was detected among the interviewees as well, it will be also shortly discussed. In general, the interviewees seemed to be in favor of using low-carbon modes of transportation on their holidays instead of planes. Many stated they could see themselves using such modes and were interested in the possibilities of these

modes and some mentioned the intention of switching planes for other modes of transport instead.

Despite these good intentions and general interest towards low-carbon travel options, interviewees also reported having planned or looked at possibilities to travel by train and ferry, but ultimately having chosen a plane as their mode of travel due to it fitting better to timetables and desire for easier travelling and less stress, hinting at the existence of an intention-behavior gap in the context of holiday travel as well. Many of the interviewees express their interest and intentions to travel without planes but mention that the global pandemic has hindered their efforts to implement the plans. This could reflect the recent change in the mindsets of people: traveling abroad without planes is such a new phenomenon that the interviewees have had to get used to it. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 and 2021, such travel is still left in the planning phases.

It is to be noted, that many studies have reported that people, when surveyed or interviewed, might express interest and intention towards green products and pro-environmental behavior, but that these intentions are not reflected in actual behavior later on (see e.g., Hassan et al., 2016; Kollmuss & Agyeman, 2002; Moisander, 2007). While this study is not a longitudinal one and therefore there is no certainty whether the interviewees will follow up in their interest and even intention to opt for low-carbon transportation, during the interview there were signs of the intention-behavior gap existing in the context of holiday travel as well, such as this example:

“The last time I travelled, I went to Spain. It was a holiday, but the reason for me to go there was my sister’s wedding. [...] My plan was to travel through Europe by train, but it did not fit the schedule, so I just flew there.” (F5P1)

While the interview questions did not specifically revolve around the intention-behavior gap or the interviewees’ reasonings for it, schedules, laziness, and the speed of planes in comparison to other modes were mentioned explicitly by the interviewees as reasons for not following through with the intention. Here, too, giving up one’s time and effort or taking time off of other duties to reach the destination on time were perhaps deemed too hard at the individual level, hence resulting in the interviewees opting for planes.

6.5 Revisiting the theoretical framework

Here, the theoretical framework presented earlier in the thesis is revised based on the empirical findings of this thesis. This framework is based on the literature review and the factors that emerged during the focus-group interviews and analysis. In this revised framework, presented below in Figure 4, the factors that affect the overall perceptions and act as enablers and barriers based on the empirical material are portrayed. The changes that have been made will be described next, followed by a short discussion of the revised framework.

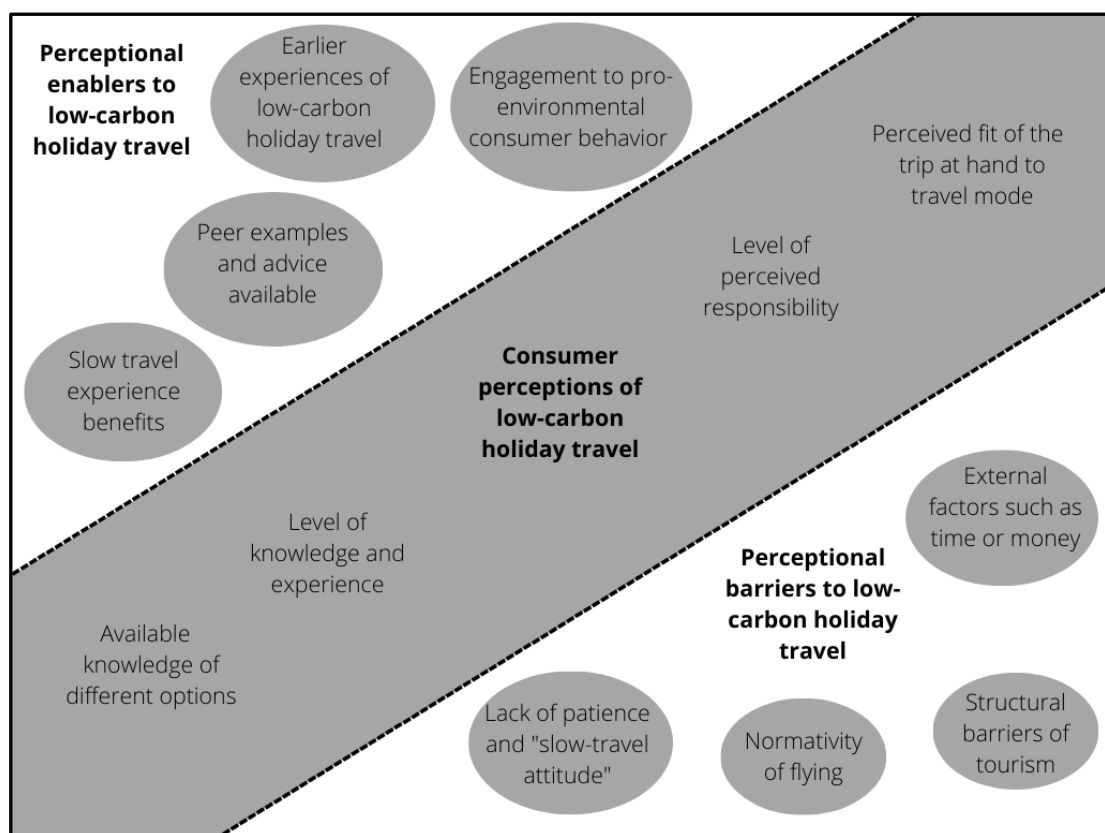


Figure 4. Revised version of consumer perceptions, perceptual barriers and enablers to low-carbon holiday travel framework.

6.5.1 Changes to the initial framework

Changes to the framework have been made to the overall factors that affect to perceptions: as the individuals all were acknowledging of climate change and eager to change behaviors, relationship to climate change could not be seen as a factor that affects the perceptions and was therefore removed. *Level of knowledge and experience*

was also added as a factor since the interviewees argued that either experience or inexperience of low-carbon travel would change perceptions of it. as the empirical data did not point to certain mode preference being an enabling factor for low-carbon travel. *Perceived fit of the trip to the travel mode* was added as a factor based on the reported context-dependence of low-carbon travel.

As for the disablers, no evidence of solely home-bound environmental behavior could be detected among the interviewees and it was therefore removed. So was the factor called lack of knowledge of climate impacts of flying since the interviewees seemed well aware of said impacts. Factors that were added include moving the *external factors such as time and money* because they seemed to repeatedly surface as reasons that disable low-carbon travel among the interviewees instead of factors that affect overall perceptions. Furthermore, *lack of patience and “slow travel attitude”* was added as a disabler because they were mentioned as factors that would hinder the appeal of low-carbon travel.

Regarding the enabling factors, no specific low-carbon mode choice preferences could not be recognized to be among the perceived enablers. However, *peer examples and advice* were seen as enablers in the empirical material as well as the *slow travel experience benefits*, referring to the holistic experience of such travel.

6.5.2 Discussion of the revised framework

Based on the findings of the study, it could be concluded that the interviewed consumers' perceptions of low-carbon holiday travel overall were positive because it was found important to try and mitigate climate change with options for aviation. They regarded that the *available knowledge* would affect one's low-carbon travel perceptions, but also acknowledged that ranging *levels of prior knowledge and experience* of independent travel and for example train travel would make low-carbon travel more attainable for some individuals than for others. Furthermore, even though all the respondents reported having changed their behavior for climate change and feeling some *level of perceived responsibility* to act, the abandonment of flying was oftentimes considered hard or impossible by some, while others expressed greater

feelings of responsibility. The *perceived fit of the trip at hand to travel mode* refers to the reported context-dependence where one transport mode is preferred over another.

Regarding the factors that pose barriers to low-carbon holiday travel, the needed resources – knowledge, time and money – are viewed by the consumers as barriers in varying degrees. Intertwined with this is the lack of *structures of tourism* that would support low-carbon travel. Examples of structures that would support rail travel, according to the interviewees are, for instance, speedier connections, easier trip planning and booking and tax policies that would incentivize rail travel instead of airplane travel monetarily. Furthermore, the *normative state of flying* is seen as barrier in that it is the easiest and most common option and some interviewees report having planned otherwise but ending up booking plane tickets instead.

As for the enabling factors, some interviewees expressed a strong *engagement to pro-environmental behavior* that would lead them to use low-carbon travel options. Otherwise, if the trip's purpose was seen as fitting for low-carbon travel, for instance, in the case of an Interrail trip, it was seen as a great option, due to the *slow travel experience benefits* of slowness and interactions with people and places, as well as the concreteness of the journey. *Peer examples and advice* as well as own *previous experiences of low-carbon travel* were also seen as factors that would encourage future low-carbon travel.

7 CONCLUSION

This part of the thesis will conclude the work, discuss the results, and formulate answers to the research questions presented in the beginning of the thesis. The theoretical and managerial implications that this research poses will also be discussed here. Finally, the limitations of the research will be discussed along with avenues for related future research.

7.1 Discussion of findings and answers to the research questions

The main research question that this thesis seeks to answer is: *What perceptions consumers have related to low-carbon holiday travel?* To specify, two sub-questions are also posed to better illustrate the perceptions. These sub-questions are: *What barriers do consumers experience related to low-carbon holiday travel?* and: *What enablers do consumers experience related to low-carbon holiday travel?*

Based on the analysis of the focus group interviews, the interviewed consumers tend to have overall positive perceptions of low-carbon holiday travel. It is viewed as an exciting alternative mode of transportation that allows for a different experience than flying to a destination by plane does. The consumers recognize that low-carbon travel takes more time, but they also view it as a more holistic travel experience, where changing sceneries, intermediary stops along the way, the company and time spent with travel companions and random encounters during the travels make the travel an experience itself.

The consumers seem to view low-carbon travel as more suitable for trips that are specifically planned around roaming around in different places with no one clear destination. Spontaneity and freedom are associated with low-carbon travel. On the other hand, the consumers seem more hesitant to think of low-carbon modes of transport as suitable for holidays that are destined to a certain one location, as the time it takes to travel to for example popular city destinations is deemed too long to justify a typical short stay at such destinations. Furthermore, combining low-carbon holiday transport with externally dictated schedules is seen as impractical. Additionally, low-

carbon holiday travel is associated among the interviewees with a certain mindset that entails flexibility and patience as well as preparing well.

As for sustainability, it is seen to be a great benefit of low-carbon holiday travel especially in comparison to planes. For this reason, trains were favored by the consumers in domestic travel, where distances were not found to be too long in comparison with the duration of the plane trip. However, the consumers also state their doubts related to the feasibility of different emission calculations and all in all express that the multifaceted nature of sustainability issues and all the factors that would ideally be considered is something that frustrates them. From the analysis it is also prevalent that the consumers, while they might fly, are actively thinking about ways to lessen the environmental impact of their travels and try to seek a middle ground between the environmental impact of their actions and the flying behavior that is deemed necessary.

With respect to the barriers that the consumers experience low-carbon holiday travel to have, they are related to the long duration of travel time in comparison to planes as well as the more complicated nature of a trip that consists of using multiple vehicles, changing trains, overnight stays during travels and booking the tickets from various booking sites. Another barrier associated with low-carbon holiday travel is that it is seen as fitting for young adults or adults who travel alone or in small groups. Family holidays to central Europe or further using such modes are seen as unattainable and impractical. All in all, low-carbon travel is compared with conventional plane travel and due to its de-centralized nature it lacks many of the benefits that the consumers associate to come with plane travel, where luggage is taken care of, information is often available in a *lingua franca*, wide range of refreshments are readily available and airline companies aid tourists in handling issues related to, for instance, delays that affect further connections. Since the consumers see much of these factors lacking in low-carbon travel, it is seen as complicated and something that would require special skills or experience.

Domestically, travel to nature destinations and less populated destinations is viewed as something that is unattainable without an access to a private vehicle. Even if the

holiday's purpose would be to hike on foot, the hiking paths are poorly accessible with public transportation in the first place

The enablers that encourage consumers to travel using low-carbon transport modes are, based on this research, mostly connected to the experience-related factors of low-carbon travel as discussed earlier. Consumers would most likely use low-carbon modes on a holiday which is specifically designed to fit the characteristics of such travel – using low-carbon travel to reach just one international destination as is done most often is not regarded as a viable type of holiday travel in the context of low-carbon transportation.

Domestically, improved train connection speed and increased discussions about the emissions of flights are what have driven consumers to opt for train travel. According to the discussions of the consumers, similar developments in speed and practicality of connections in international rail travel would lower the barriers of opting for low-carbon travel destined over country borders. Furthermore, stories and examples in the media of people who have travelled abroad using low-carbon transportation could also be something that would inspire individuals and make low-carbon travel seem like a viable option.

7.2 Theoretical implications

The research at hand contributes to consumer behavior research around more sustainable options for tourism – it illustrates how consumers view low-carbon travel options and what aspects drive consumers to use them or to not use them. Drawing from previous literature related to sustainable consumer behavior and sustainable holiday travel, as well as on literature examining the intention-behavior gap, this research proposes a low-carbon holiday travel perception framework that offers an explanation as for the factors that affect consumer perceptions on the subject.

Furthermore, the research could also be argued to contribute to slow travel research in that it explores how conventional consumers with no specific preference for slow travel perceive it. On the other hand, the research suggests that diminishing environmental impacts of travel could motivate tourists to engage in slow travel in

increasing amounts instead of the sole appeal of slow travel modes of transport and the perks they are perceived to offer.

The findings of this study contribute to research regarding people's perceptions towards low-carbon modes of transport in helping understand what factors drive consumers away or towards climate conscious travel. As research pertaining to consumers' perceptions of low-carbon travel has been scant before, the empirical data reveals the conflicting feelings consumers have both about flying but also about international low-carbon travel.

This research further illustrates the established nature of aviation but also shows that there are also factors that facilitate other modes of travel. As especially the enabling factors that encourage low-carbon travel have not been studied in much detail before, this research helps at creating an understanding of what consumers view as factors that motivate using such transport modes during holidays.

While the proposed framework leaves possibilities for development and future studies, as does the entire subject consumer perceptions of low-carbon travel, it can illustrate possible reasons behind the decisions tourists make regarding holiday transport mode choice. The research can also help in gaining a wider understanding of what directs tourists towards or away from sustainable modes of travel.

7.3 Managerial implications

Managerial implications that this research suggests to professionals operating in transport and tourism are that climate issues interest travelers still and that travelers are seeking options to lessen the environmental impacts of their holiday travels. This is important information to all transport sectors and also marketers working in those fields – while discussions of decreasing or even abandoning flying are present, for some it is not possible, and some situations and lifestyles necessitate flying. Therefore, it could be argued that more ecological modes of aviation would be welcome on the markets.

It was found in this study that while consumers seek sustainable options, they also wish for transparent and clear communications regarding those subjects and are eager to find out more about the climate impacts of their actions. This information could be used to differentiate corporate sustainability discourse in marketing since consumers seem to view corporate sustainability communications as conflicting and misleading. By fostering transparent and open marketing communications, these doubts could be alleviated, and consumer decision-making could be made easier.

What is more, consumers seem to believe in the future of rail travel and are looking forward to developments in the field. Rail travel is seen as a comfortable and practical mode of transport especially domestically and potential is seen also in longer trips by train. In addition, the research suggests that there could be interest towards new services that would help tourists traveling by train in Europe, such as booking sites that combine European rail networks efficiently and packaged holiday options for the less experienced train travelers. Potential could also lie in finding ways to combine aviation and rail travel, combining the appreciated speed of air travel with the experience-related aspects of rail travel with less environmental burden. However, to ensure this, further market inquiries should be made.

In order to drive change and lessen the environmental impacts of tourism, aside from government-level policymaking, transport and tourism businesses could approach holiday travel from a different viewpoint than conventionally. Instead of marketing a quick weekend getaway to a city destination, domestic travel options could be highlighted, and train holidays could be also marketed as a way to slow down and gain different experiences than plane travel enables. Marketing communications could highlight the aspects of low-carbon travel that are valued by the consumers: the slower, holistic travel experience consisting of adventurous exploration, quality time with loved ones or oneself, encounters on the train and spontaneous occurrences that differentiate low-carbon travel from the air travel experience that is deemed predictable by the consumers.

7.4 Limitations and suggestions for future research

There are limitations in all research. Here, some of the limitations this research has will be discussed. Firstly, the researcher always interprets the findings of the research through one's own perspective. Therefore, even though objectivity is the goal of research, the researcher's perspective can affect the results of the analysis.

Secondly, the sample was limited in its scope due to the time restrictions related to the thesis writing process. Both the limited age range of the participants and their high level of environmental knowledge and interest apparent from the discussions limit the generalizability of the sample and leave out people who represent other age groups and environmental inclinations and knowledge levels. On the other hand, an argument towards a sample of young adults can be made in the vein of Markkula and Moisander (2011) who argue that young, relatively highly educated adults "have the necessary cultural capital and economic means to act as 'ecologically oriented consumers'" (p. 111). Studying a group like this therefore illustrates the barriers and enablers of low-carbon travel among a pro-environmentally inclined group of people, giving information on what keeps even the most motivated and able consumers from adapting more pro-environmental holiday travel behaviors. However, in future studies, wider demographic presentation would allow for more generalizable findings and for instance people with a wider array of climate knowledge would likely be represented.

The sample was partially gathered through the researchers' personal social media accounts, likely resulting in people from similar (socio-economic) backgrounds volunteering in the research. In light of this, similar future research could be conducted where the pool of interviewees could represent people from different age groups and backgrounds. An especially interesting future research direction could be a comparison between avid low-carbon travelers and avid flyers that could further illustrate the differences in trip planning that a person's environmental inclination poses.

Thirdly, during the interviews and the analysis, it became evident that clear definitions of low-carbon transport were hard to find. The term was originally adopted into this thesis from Dickinson et al. (2011) but it emerged during the interviews that ferries were a relevant topic in discussing transport from and to Finland without planes, that

Dickinson et al. (2011) did not discuss. Furthermore, in the interviews that were held in Finnish, the emergent term “maata pitkin matkustaminen” was often used which roughly translates to traveling by land and is often defined as “traveling without planes”. How the Finnish term is used currently could include the ferries even though they also emit significant amounts of CO₂ and could be argued not to be low-carbon. However, the phenomenon and discussion around “maata pitkin matkustaminen” being rather recent and unacademic, it lacks a clear, agreed-upon definition. In recent public discussions it is mostly plane travel that is being abandoned by public figures and shunned by climate scientists, even though at least in Finland ferries are used widely and seaways shorten the distance to other parts of Europe considerably. In future research pertaining to this subject, the terminology to discuss different modes of transport should be defined carefully to distinguish what is being discussed.

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Appendix 1

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Consumer perceptions of low-carbon holiday travel and the perceptual barriers and enablers related to it

Where have you last traveled during a holiday? What kind of trip was it? Which vehicle did you use?

When you think about your holidays and their planning phase, what factors affect the decisions you make regarding travel destination, accommodation, transportation etc.?

Have you followed the discussion related to climate change? What kind of thoughts does it evoke?

Do you think that the discussion related to climate change affects people's behavior? Does it show in holiday travel?

Does climate change affect your own behavior? If so, how?

Do you feel the responsibility to do deeds for the climate? What kind of deeds? Are there areas that you feel you are not responsible of?

Maatapitkin.net website is presented

What kind of thoughts does this material evoke? What would traveling abroad by train or coach sound like? What would it demand?

Do you already have experiences of traveling by land? What kind?

What differences do these modes of transport have in comparison to flying or private cars?

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What kind of thoughts does this material evoke?

Do you think that people at a general level would be motivated to travel by land more?

What would it demand for such a thing to occur?

If you imagine going on a trip by land, what do you imagine being easy, exciting and nice about the preparations and the trip? What would be difficult, boring and complicated?

What kind of perceptions do you have regarding travelling by land based on these materials or prior knowledge?

Nowadays traveling from Finland to for example Central Europe by land is a rather marginal phenomenon. Why do you think that is? Is it necessary for it to become a more common phenomenon? If so, how could this be promoted?